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SUBJECT: Sri Lankan Provincial and Municipal Council Elections Offer Few Surprises

Ref: A) Colombo 780 B) Colombo 781

11. (SBU) On August 8, elections were held for the Uva provincial council, the municipal councils in Jaffna, and the urban council in Vavuniya, where many IDPs are currently located. President Rajapaksa's ruling United Party Freedom Alliance (UPFA) scored a significant victory in the Sinhala dominated Uva Provincial Council with 72.39 percent of the votes and in the Jaffna Municipal Council elections with 50.67 percent of the votes. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) emerged as the single largest party winner with 34.81 percent of the votes in the Vavuniya Urban Council (VUC). Voter turnout in Uva Province was 72 percent. In Jaffna, where there were some limited reports of direct intimidation, the turnout was only about 20 percent. In Vavuniya, the turnout was 50 percent. Seat breakdown is as follows:

Uva Provincial Council: UPFA - 25 seats, United National Party (UNP) - 7 seats, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)- 1 seat, Up-country People's Front (Tamil) - 1 seat.

Jaffna Municipal Council: UPFA - 13 seats, TNA - 8 seats, Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) - 1 seat, Independents - 1 seat, UNP - 0 seats.

Vavuniya Urban Council: TNA - 5 seats, Democratic People's Liberation Front (DPLF) - 3 seats, UPFA - 2 seats, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) - 1 seat.

12. (SBU) COMMENT: In the first post-war elections in Sri Lanka after the defeat of the LTTE, the results in Jaffna municipality and the Uva Province were significant wins for the ruling UPFA. Pro-government media interpreted these election results as a demonstration of the population's support for the government's actions in the war and post-war development plans. The ruling UPFA's wins in Jaffna and Uva were not surprising given the government's efforts to boost turnout and restrict the activities of opposition parties. The TNA's good showing in Vavuniya probably reflects the Tamil population's frustrations over the IDP camps, higher voter turnout (as compared to Jaffna where voters were less upset with the government), and the UPFA's lack of a Tamil ally to help sway voters as Douglas Devananda of the Eelam People's Democratic Party did in Jaffna. The low turnout in Jaffna is partly attributable to the fact that of the approximately 100,000 eligible voters, 40,000 voter cards were returned to the post office as undeliverable, reflecting in part the large number of residents who have moved overseas in recent years, as well as deaths. The government's willingness to allow a Tamil opposition party victory in Vavuniya can be interpreted as a positive sign. However, the lack of broad Tamil support previews the challenges the government will face in the upcoming Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

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